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Williams, Luke (2016) Individualism. BOMB Magazine 134 , pp. 82-90. ISSN 0743-3204.

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Individualism

From *Diego Garcia*, a novel in installments

4 June 2010, Edinburgh. The brightness of the morning. Sky flat. No clouds. When he came into her room with coffee she was already awake. She didn't tell him to go away or chuck a pillow at him. She didn't swear at him or hide her face in the duvet or ask him to go fetch tubes from the kitchen only to block his return with a chair. She was sitting up in bed, eyes closed, a notebook on her lap, pen moving slowly across the page. b? She put the pen down and opened her eyes. He was wearing that kimono thing we thought looked odd but which he sometimes claimed looked badass, the way a kimono would look on a Yakuza. She said, You look good in that today. A bit Mishima. Hangs better now. He put the mugs down on a stack of blocks by her bed—all Jelinek—then climbed in beside her. He was trying to decide whether he was upset about what had happened—her leaving him outside Sandy Bells, her staying out with the Sad Man. She said, You missed a *great night*. What happened? We mostly just talked. *He* talked. About what? Oh, lots. The man's a fuckin *storyteller*. And the way he puts things! *A man in a wig made me British*. Is that what you're writing down he said—things *he* said? Oh *no*. She'd had an idea, a novelization of Michael Haneke's film of Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*. The block of the film of the block! Her mood was bright for now. He went to fetch toast and cereal but when he returned she didn't want to eat because there was no time and there was too much to say and she continued telling him about her night with Diego. Who? The Sad Man she said. Diego, that's his name. Me and Diego met this guy on leave from Faslane who told us about being on submarines. Under the sea for ninety days. Messages from home held back til you land. No daylight no fresh air no fresh food. And the smell! You never know where the fuck you are the submariner said, they never tell you. Then Diego said: You could have been in Diego Garcia! But the submariner had no fuckin idea where Diego Garcia was. She paused. *We* have no fucking idea about Diego Garcia *full stop*. That's probably where they keep the blacksites cells. On ships in the lagoon. That's why they can say, *We Don't Torture Anyone ON Diego Garcia*. Drink your coffee he said. I don't want coffee I want Lucozade. And tubes. She lifted her jeans off the floor with her big toe. I love how my feet freak you out she said. He said, They're just too like hands. She pulled a crumpled pack of tubes from the pocket—Horseman—and we smoked out the window. The billboard above Scotmid still read "Straight Talking Money. Wonga." She said, I'm sorry I left you last night, I'll never leave you again. Then when he didn't say anything, You don't have to talk, I'm fuckin crawling with stories. Write them down he said, at the library. You're coming aren't you? I don't know if I can she said suddenly feeling tired and nauseous, The light hurts. Put your sunglasses on he said, I'll treat you like a star in rehab.

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The branding of Horseman cigarettes is a rip-off of Sportsman. Instead of the profile of a horse's head there's a profile of a horse with a jockey on its back. The artwork is the same—a drawing in Eighteenth Century realist style—and the packet is the same red as Sportsman. But instead of Sportsman (in lower case) it says HORSEMAN. In 2007 British American Tobacco Kenya, makers of Sportsman, sued Cut Tobacco Kenya, makers of Horseman. The judge said: It has to be observed that the use of the

color red as the predominant color in a packet of cigarettes is not the exclusive preserve of anybody including the plaintiff. The judge said: Having regard to all the above different characteristics of the get up and/or appearance in the two packets, particularly the principal colors thereof whereby one packet (Sportsman) has two major colors (red and white) while Horseman has one (red) it is my opinion that there is no way anyone who is able to see clearly could be deceived by the appearance of the two packets.¹

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The Meadows. Buskers. Her walking on ahead, his hand on her shoulder. *The sadness* as always but today it was *funny*. How sad things were how shit we felt. We were ridiculous! She was feeling better. She felt a charge of happiness and broke into a run, he found her standing next to a busker who was playing the guitar. Her check shirt was buttoned up wrong, the neck too open, jeans falling off her hips like a 14-year-old boy. Do you know *The Streets of London*? The busker shook his head. She sang. *So how can you tell me, you're lo-oh-nely and say for you that the sun don't shine?* Come on star-in-rehab he said, taking her arm. She leaned over and whispered in the busker's ear. The busker nodded, started to play—a sad song. *Oh my land is like a wild goose...* She has a frail voice that cracks sometimes and the busker's was low and the harmonizing was nice. The bright sun, the dust off the path. A tear, now tears rolling down her cheeks—seeming sad but also joyful or comic because of her shades, which was odd, shades and tears, like celebrities at funerals, or stars in rehab. Her nose started to run and she wiped the snot with the back of her hand like she had boxing gloves on. She ran off toward the Swedish café, he ran after her and the end of the last song turned into the beginning of the next, *Rock & Roll* by the VU, we like to play it in the mornings if we're feeling *all right*.

When he entered the Swedish café she was sitting at the table we liked to sit at, her mood changed. The light was hurting again, she was feeling the nausea, feeling awful. She said, Will you get a coffee? Can't you? No she said, I don't want to look at anyone. You're wearing sunglasses! I don't want anyone to look at *me*. He looked at her the question is, how long can my skin hold me in and she said, Will you please just get a coffee please.

The thing about the Swedish café was that sometimes we liked it and sometimes we didn't. It depended on our mood, on whether we were taking things personally that day. Often we couldn't bear it, yet we stopped there most days on our way to the library. Even at the time we wondered why we kept going, despite the prices being steep despite the shelves being filled with desirable products we couldn't afford despite it forming an unexceptional part of the totally administered society. He might tell her that he liked it because the coffee was good and because it took credit cards and didn't have wifi. And she: because the cardamom buns were *delicious* and because the workers were friendly and looked so good in their grey-brown aprons. And he: if we were feeling stupid or insane when we were there our thoughts and sentences seemed less stupid and more sane. Yes she might have said, it could bring a sense of unhurried calm to the most agitated emotions. But the real reason we continued to go—although we did not articulate it at the time—was because of a fantasy. While we believed that *the sadness* was due to the systematic contradictions of life under The Emergency, there were times when this conviction faltered, and we'd dismiss the idea of The Emergency, as just that, nothing more than an appealing totality. We'd attribute *the sadness* locally, to our own personal deficiencies, or else we'd feel so fragmented we'd say simply, "I feel shit" or "I'm losing it." It's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. It was then *the sadness* became a feeling we could no longer share. Sure, it was something we had in common, we both felt shit and/or mad more or less often. But its effects on us were so radically different—she: drinking herself stupid, spending whole days in bed, spiraling; he: ranting, not eating, researching emergency supplies, looking quietly critically stupidly at the ground—that we forgot that our feelings resulted from the same phenomena. At such times, the only correspondence in *the sadness* we felt was that s/he seemed bound

1. "British American Tobacco Kenya Limited v Cut Tobacco Kenya Limited" (2007), CIVIL APPEAL 278 OF 2002, <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/41279>, last accessed January 8, 2015.

to suffer it on her/his own. We failed to recognize *the sadness* as something bound up with uncontrollable global abstractions and related barbarism; instead we'd turn for comfort to that *scene of community* offered by the Swedish café—the clean wooden décor, the smells of home baking and *delicious* coffee, its open-faced staff, its notice board advertising infant yoga classes, writing retreats in the Highlands.

He returned from the counter. Her arms were spread on the table, cheek on arms, head empty. He nudged an elbow aside and put down the coffee and bun. She felt very strongly that her head was close to breaking. He sat down and took a sip of the coffee which was *delicious*. He considered taking his screen out to look over his notes on *Minima Moralia* or one of the other blocks he was reading, or else on one of the things he was thinking about writing. She thought, If I move my arms my head will fall apart. He thought, If I take my screen out something might happen. Then, Something *always* happens: my thoughts peter out, they wander off like *cats*. She thought, What's he doing I hope he doesn't drink all the coffee. And he: No, *rats*, the thoughts scurry away like rats. He looked up at the people in the café with their screens or their blocks. He looked down, her eyes were half-open, we looked at one another briefly *can't see his eyes just the light on his glasses*. She closed her eyes, thinking, If he gets me a straw I could drink some coffee without moving my head. She opened one eye and looked around. Scrubbed wood, yellow sun, reflections off the glass. He cracked his knuckles without realizing he was doing it, thinking, Every morning we look at the billboard opposite to see what's changed. He again: We were better off in London, at least we were writing then, at least we'd written blocks that were published and read... at least we managed to turn up to the library, to keep regular hours. Now we can't seem to write anything. *I can't seem to write anything*. As for her, she never stops. But she never finishes. She thought: I really could do with a fuckin straw. He: But then again we do get the odd teaching gig, an invitation to do something

Straw!

or to write something and our blocks did get reviewed, not something to be taken for granted

Straw!!

and when we're lucky one of us does manage to get a story published or a

STRAW!!

Sorry, b? I need a fuckin *STRAW!!!* He lowered his face to hers. If-you-get-me-a-straw she said—like she was talking to a moron—I-can-drink-some-of-this-coffee-and-I-will feel-better. He was impressed by her strategizing.

Once she'd drank she removed the straw from her mouth and slowly, carefully, sat up. She felt a rush of feeling and looked at his face. She began to eat the cardamom bun, offered him some, he shook his head, saying, Tell me more about Diego. Is he really from Chagos? We are like Stiegler's flying fish she said, standing up and almost toppling the chair as she dashed to the bathroom where she threw up into the pristine wooden bowl that functioned as a sink.

When she returned she was feeling calm and her stomach was a bit calmer. We left the Swedish café. She lit a tube to take the edge off her hunger. It was as she smoked the tube that she told him the following story.

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Me and Diego were having a nice night, we'd been to a few different places and were walking through the Meadows. This couple was passing and the bloke said something to us, or Diego *thought* he said something to us, something Diego considered

unacceptable. So Diego stopped, called after him, told him to come back, then when he didn't, ran at him and pushed him onto the grass—and then we saw that the bloke was really young and that his girl was really young and that she was wearing a cross around her neck. And the bloke, as he picked himself up and moved quickly to hold his girl, shouted at Diego, asking what the fuck he thought he was doing, his girlfriend was pregnant for fuck's sake. Diego looked shocked, like he *was* in shock. I went to touch the girl, trying to say sorry, but she flinched, I backed away, I remember saying how Diego had been on a long journey, like we couldn't imagine. And then I gave Diego my arm and he took it, sort of stunned, and we walked away, him leaning on me. At this point I realized Diego reminded me of someone I used to see around Camden, someone who used to just sit on this step outside a hostel on Mornington Crescent, always in the same trousers, combat trousers, this kind of zombie stare. I remembered what he wore because on him they looked like *actual combat gear* and I used to think he was the veteran of some civil war, and I was afraid of him because he had started to notice me, I was afraid he would start speaking to me and I didn't want to know.

Anyway, as we walked away I was thinking Diego looked *just like* that man—it was the stare, stunned or tranquil, fatally so, like Agamben's Musselman. Anyway, we left the Meadows and went into the first pub we came to, it was riotous, which seemed to calm Diego, probably the distraction. Though it was a crappy pub it had this old jukebox, with actual records in it. I put some tracks on and at one point this woman started

dancing—*Rapture*—and just for something to say because we hadn't said anything since leaving the Meadows—just to *change the subject*—I started boasting about how people were digging my taste in music and Diego said this thing, about how that woman *pe dans kom si kikun pe mord sa fes*—yeah, that's it, we were speaking Creole, I don't know when we started speaking it, maybe after we lost you—but her son, Diego said—a morose lanky streak of piss sitting with a load of older women who all looked like the mum, him looking miserable—her son was the real test. I bet I can get *him* to dance. We made it interesting. Chose three tracks each. I thought “Ace of Spades” might do it but when the son hadn't moved after our six songs we just kept on going, taking it in turns, you know, like penalties. Anyway, at one point we went out to smoke tubes and when we returned the landlady was calling time and “Intergalactic”—Beastie Boys, you moron—was playing and the son had got up and was bustin robot moves!

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There were things we liked about the city and things we disliked about the city. We liked the fact that his credit stretched further up there than in London. We disliked the office/lifestyle apartment buildings that were appearing around the Meadows. We liked the fact that the Sainsbury's on our way home from the library had a well-stocked “reduced” section which we called the “gourmet” section. We disliked the New Town, that unimaginative part of the city where the buildings seemed to have no insides. We liked the tap water because it tasted different, fresher, and the light, which made everything appear as if filtered. We disliked the wind but sometimes we liked it, though not when it made us cold and knocked us about. We liked the galleries, the national modern one and the long unspeaking waterside treks we'd take to get there. And the Portrait Gallery where the portraits seemed to have no faces at all, just paint. We liked that the city is right next to a volcano, an extinct fake-looking one that overlooks a royal palace. We disliked the Royal Mile although she liked the sound of live bagpipes. We liked the gruffness/gentleness of the people and that we never knew which we'd get or even, sometimes, which was which. We disliked those

At this point I realized Diego reminded me of someone I used to see around Camden, someone who used to just sit on this step outside a hostel on Mornington Crescent, always in the same trousers, combat trousers, this kind of zombie stare.

English boys and girls who attended Edinburgh University who wore pajamas in the street. We liked the fact that we didn't feel part of the city, which didn't seem part of the world but like the absence of any kind of world.

In 1978 Bernard Stiegler was working in a club in Toulouse when it was raided by police, who found heroin there. The club was shut down. Stiegler found himself without work or money. He robbed a bank. Then another. And another. During his fourth robbery he was arrested and jailed for five years. It was during his time in prison that Stiegler made a study of philosophy. Of his incarceration, Stiegler says: I no longer lived in the world, but rather in the absence of a world, which presented itself here not only as a default, but as that which is *always* in default, and as a *necessary default*—rather than as a lack. Stiegler says: the milieu in which we live is, like water is for a fish, that which is most close and thus *structurally forgotten*; water is what the fish *always* sees; it is what it *never* sees. Stiegler says: While incarcerated I considered the milieu while being able to extract myself from it, in the same way as a flying fish can leave the water: intermittently.

Because the things we liked about the city outnumbered the things we disliked; or rather—since we could always find more things to like and dislike—because the quality of our appreciation for the things we liked outweighed the negative effect of those we didn't, we had the sense that that strange city, which we would not leave until it had set its mark on us, was a better place than the place we had left.

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Walking through the new development behind the Swedish café, on our way to the library. The day brighter still, light shifting on the paving slabs. Empty it's people that make a place seem real. Her screen flashed—debtfuckersdontanswer—and she threw it at the ground with all her force. Why? He ran to collect the scattered parts, she carried on walking and we came together at the traffic lights, the sun on our faces, *the sadness opening out to something like joy*. He slid the screen together, handed it back to her. Then he said, Did you pull him? Who, Diego? No! Brown boys are like *relatives*. You know I only do white boys. We linked arms and crossed Lauriston Place onto Forest Road. How is your love life these days, p, eh? When did *you* last have sex? She was bouncing on the balls of her feet, jabbing at him, feeling the rush of the coffee. He didn't say anything. She's too much. We stopped at the lights. What are we doing now? she said, Where are we going? Library? I skipped dinner last night, will you get me a soup please, and a pie?

Greyfriars Kirkyard. Smell of dog shit mixed with two different kinds of roses—honeyed, soapy. The sun brighter still. Having drunk a Coke she was excited, she went to sit on our bench. A group of exchange students was staring. Hostile boredom. He said, Let's go and sit over there—pointing to a kind of bed-shaped monument away from the students. No she said, Graves aren't meant to be *sat on*. What about him? he said. *That guy?* That waxy-looking guy in the Children in Need sweatshirt? I think it's the Great Ormond Street logo he said. Whatever, the junksick don't give a fuck. He hung his head, she stared at the exchange students, she took in their brown legs and blond legs and their matching red backpacks. Then she saw their guide, who was talking and laughing, pointing to things around the kirkyard. She said, He's *beautiful*. She loves the way the world looks. Please, b he hissed, Let's just go and sit back there. No! She threw her sunglasses at him WHY?!? they hit him on the chest then slipped down onto the ground, he let them lie where they fell then turned and walked away from the bench, exhausted. A massive change, if you can have massive change in a place like this. He was feeling cold, despite the sun being out. She sat for a moment looking at the *beautiful* guide speaking to his exchange group. But then she felt awful again, really awful, nauseous, self-conscious and she got off the bench and ran to him, taking his arm and dragging on it in an annoying way. We reached the grave/monument. The sky was clear, the rich colors of the city floated beyond the kirkyard walls. She said, What's wrong with you? He didn't say anything. She lit a tube and looked directly at him. Were you feeling a bit self-conscious? I mean in front

of the exchange students? Like we were part of the tour? Huh? You know she said, the guide telling the kids about Burke and Hare and Greyfriars Bobby and all that, and then pointing out examples of Scottish urban park life. *And over there on that grave under the chestnut tree you can see two examples of the Scottish proletariat...* He stood up. You're not Scottish he said. He began to walk away from the grave/monument, saying, Much less a member of the proletariat. And it's *not a grave*. She, shouting: I'm more Scottish than you, my gom's grand-mère was Scottish, you weren't even born here, you were born in fuckin LEICESTER... oh come back, please! He stopped, turned, walked slowly back, *the sadness* mixed with anger, overwhelming him. He didn't know what he was going to say until, leaning close, his face really near, he said, Fuck off. Oh she said... oh. She got up and started to walk away, leaving him standing there, leaving her soup, her pie, walking at pace through the kirkyard gate and out into the street.

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In the library she did not so much read as pick up blocks, flick through the pages, put them down again then pick up new ones, then repeat the gesture. Eventually she got stuck on one block, *The Piano Teacher*, which she'd read before. She read one passage again and again then not knowing what else to do she put it down, opened her screen up and began to type: Dear p, I've been trying to look into this Jelinek idea. I was trying to reread the novel, but just got stuck on this: *Erika says that she, Erika, is an individualist. She claims she cannot submit to anyone or anything. She has a hard time just fitting in. Someone like Erika comes along only once, and then never again. If something is especially irreplaceable, it is called Erika.* I should not have left you. You should be here, with me. Do you remember the first time we met, we went to the library, or was it a party, or was it a party in a library, I don't know, I remember being with you in a library soon after we met, the reading room at the British Museum, before it closed, I remember going to sleep under the desk and you watching out for me. I wish you were here. And not just cos I need to sleep right now. *Really* need to sleep! Not just from last night but all this churning in my head from what just happened with you—need to crawl under the desk and crash but I can't—not when you're not here, I never can sleep in public unless you're beside me, awake, but not watching over me, no—more like witnessing. I just looked online to see if they're ever going to reopen that reading room in the British Museum and on the website is a list of famous people who applied for tickets in its heyday, Karl Marx, Lenin, Bram Stoker, Conan Doyle. No Virginia Woolf, no mention of the research she did or failed to do there for *A Room of One's Own*. Did these famous people ever nap under the desks I wonder, no, perhaps not, but perhaps they sat next to many a hungover writer who napped, nameless, under their desks for decades then left the library as unknown as they'd entered it... She saw a message on her other screen from an unattributed number: *b it's me (on barwoman's screen).* In *Sandy Bells*. Come. She put it in her pocket, continued typing: I just got a summons from you. I will join you in a minute. It's not like I'm working well. I have just taken

In the kirkyard he went to find another monument, one made out of stone this time, because he was still feeling cold and he wanted to warm himself like a lizard, like a chameleon which he knew are soft to the touch, softer than one might imagine, and he found a monument with patches of moss on it, he lay back closing his eyes but he didn't feel any warmer, even in the direct sunlight he was feeling cold. Without knowing why, he laughed out loud. Then he felt cold again, even colder than before. He got up wanting to find her because perhaps she could warm him, also he wanted to find her and tell her he was sorry for telling her to fuck off, to tell her that despite everything we were better off together. But when he got to the road he realized he didn't know where she was. Maybe she'd gone to the library, or back to the Swedish café, or maybe she'd taken one of the those buses she sometimes took for no other reason than the sound of the destination—Jewel, Hunter's Tryst. He checked the Swedish café then Sandy Bells, then he went to the library but found himself unable to move. He turned away and let himself be carried by chance, but he didn't want to go too far from where he thought she might be (the library?) and after a little while he found himself back at Sandy Bells where he asked the barwoman if he could use her screen to send a message and she said sure and something about bags that he didn't catch and after sending the message he leaned over the bar and said, Have you ever stroked a chameleon? they feel soft, not dry like you'd think, they feel like chamois leather, and the barwoman said No, I have not stroked a chameleon, and a woman at the bar, listening, said Do you keep them? And he said, No, I was just in the Meadows once and a couple of girls came up to me to ask for a light, one of them had this lizard-thing crouching on her arm, it was a chameleon, she invited me to stroke it, and its eyes were what I found most amazing, orbs that can swivel 360 degrees in their sockets, and they have these grumpy, turned-down mouths, the girl told me she planned to breed chameleons in captivity and then release them into the wild. When he finished speaking he realized he felt cold. The barwoman turned to another customer. He thought he ought to get warm, and left the

off my shoes and I can feel the carpet on my feet. I have the words to a song in my head: *And just like in a movie/ Her hands became her feet*. That lyric reminds me of me or rather, makes me think that it would remind you of me. So this is me thinking of you thinking of me. Where to start with us, eh p? The lyric is by Lou Reed. After he went solo. Lou Reed was always solo, even when he was in the VU he was solo. And it's something I am starting to think about you. Do you know *Perfect Day*? (Everyone knows it but you rarely know what everyone knows.) An account of a perfect day shared with someone. Written in the first person singular with occasional reference to the second person singular and third person plural—one half of a couple singing to the other. Reed said it was about his then-wife Betty but some people reckon it's his love song to heroin, in which case the "we" in the song is really "I," not to mention the "you." If the singer was really alone (heroin being an individualizing kind of drug). If *Perfect Day* is about a drug experience then that's like Reed singing to/about an invisible friend. I mention this because sometimes, lately, I think, Have I made him (AKA you) up? Being with you used to feel more like being alone than being alone: not lonely, but *myself*. I was not completely myself if you were not there. But lately it has felt more that I am missing something when I'm with you. Is it time to go our own ways? Maybe that's what you've not been able to tell me in recent weeks with your strange refusals of conversation, of food. With your "fuck off." So maybe I will. I made recordings of Diego's stories on my screen last night. I didn't tell you but I have those stories. Do you know *A Life Full of Holes* by Driss ben Hamed Charhadi? Charhadi was illiterate, apparently, and dictated the novel to his friend Paul Bowles, who transcribed and translated it. Me and Diego can do this, why not. I don't have to stay here. I don't have to stay with you. One of the blocks I've been flicking through today: Sontag's *Under The Sign of Saturn*. The title essay: *Irony is the positive name which the melancholic gives to his solitude, his asocial choices...* When you told me to fuck off you were maybe just being ironic. But that doesn't mean you didn't mean it. If that's what you want I'll fuck off. But I will always be your b

pub. He went over to the charity shop across the road. She often went into charity shops and he waited outside while she browsed the bric-a-brac which she called "heirloom corner" and the vinyl and the blocks, always the fuckin blocks, but now he went in and bought a woolen hat and jumper and a pair of tracksuit bottoms, all for £4.50, and the jumper smelt like the grave but he didn't care, he just put the hat on then the rest of the clothes on over what he was wearing. He also looked at the blocks but there was nothing that interested him so he went to a nearby blockshop. He stayed for a while picking up one block then another, then he decided he would look up some Bernard Stiegler because she'd always told him that Stiegler was a philosopher-saint, like Weil like Genet like Guyotat. He picked up *Acting Out*. He flicked through and stopped on page four. The section was called "*I and we in the process of individuation*." The *I*, as a psychic individual, Stiegler writes, can only be thought in relationship to *we*, which is a collective individual:

*If every I is inscribed in the we that constitutes it, and that it constitutes, if the I and the we are two faces of the same process of individuation, at the core of which develops their tendency to become-indivisible, ceaselessly projecting their accomplished unity, this projection is never concretized except by default, in other words by ceaselessly deferring this completion which, if realized, would be the end of the process of individuation or, in other words, the end of the individual. Having become herself, completed, no longer changing, a finished individual, achieved, she would be without future. The end is, then, since it can never be realized, ceaselessly fictioned. This is true of the psychic individual that is the I just as much as it is of the collective individual that is the we.*²

He folded the corner of the page, excited. What Stiegler was saying had something to do with why he'd told her to fuck off. Might it help to explain himself and persuade her that he was truly sorry for telling her to fuck off? He glanced around, took *Minima Moralia* out of his bag, placed it on the shelf, put the copy of *Acting Out* into his pocket. Then he walked out of the shop and back to Sandy Bells.

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She spotted him from the door of Sandy Bells. He was sitting in the corner, near where the musicians sat. What is he wearing? His face in a block. Looks like a lone gunman. Stiegler. She sat down next to him, we looked at one another in surprise. He pushed his pint over and she took a sip. Then he opened his rucksack, he took out a paper bag saying, You forgot your pie. Then, I'm sorry, I didn't mean... of course I didn't... Her tears appeared instantly. Rolled unchecked. He put an arm around her, pulled her into him, she did not resist, burying her face in his jumper. His/her chest/forehead felt hot against her/his forehead/chest. We stayed that way while he watched our reflection in the brass trim of the bar. After several minutes she was still weeping so he lowered his lips to her ear. *Here you have an example of two Scottish types, the choochter and the scaffy*—his voice soft, reverent. *As a rule, the choochter and the scaffy are both loners: the choochter burying himself for preference in remote undergrowth while the scaffy, due to a high social drive, is unable to keep regular company with any one*

mate or group. Her snort was muffled by his jumper. Moreover members of these species rarely cross paths, since they are found in vastly different environments. And yet these two seem to have formed a freakish extra-species relationship, a symbiotic partnership. Look at how the choochter is overcoming his habitual suspicion of all living things. Look at how he marvels at her, see how he puts his arm around her as she sits up trembling. She sat up further, rubbing her face, took the pie from the bag. She's trembling with excitement as—look!—she puts to her mouth that basic staple of the scaffy's diet: the pie. Scaffies prize pies of any kind, it doesn't matter what's in the pie, meat, veggies, or mash, even macaroni, who cares, as long as its sealed by a dry greasy crust it counts as a pie. Stop she said, making choking sounds. You can see she's eating her pie with great gusto, she's enjoying it so much that she's laughing as she chews it, even though she risks choking on her pie. Yes, she's laughing as if it's the first thing she's eaten in days. Stop, p! Hitting him on the chest. See how, in laughing, she wastes the pastry, spluttering it from her lips, even though she can't afford to waste this pie and is doubtless very hungry. Another characteristic trait of the scaffy: an indulgence of base short-term instincts that override what will best serve her longevity. And now this, a foolish tendency to generosity at her own expense: look how she is trying to press upon the choochter some of her pie, even though pies do not form part of the choochter's staple diet and he is clearly refusing, her insistence an example of the drive to dominate. She moved away from him and murmured, Let us observe more closely the scaffy's companion, the male, a somewhat diminished example of the usually robustly built choochter. Observe his scrawny frame, his pieless state, though he is refusing the morsels offered to him by the scaffy, an example of the choochter's self-defeating nature, which, in rogue examples of the species, can result in an overdetermined death drive. Look at the almost lustful way he gazes at the scaffy's pie, licking his dry lips both lasciviously and fearfully at the prospect of another invitation to share in the scaffy's meager meal. But he will of course refuse, as he is currently embarked on a ritual period of self-starvation... a kind of ceremonial rite of passage for that outcast class of choochter known as... the artist. I'm not scrawny he said. I do eat. It's just that right now I never feel hungry. When do you feel hungry? She went to the bar and ordered two pints from the barwoman, her with the flautist's lips who never smiled. The barwoman said something about bags. A Belfast accent, voice warm but her face cool. Bags? The ones you left in the toilet last night. Oh! she said, They're not mine. You need to take them or my manager will hand them to the police. Back at our table with the pints. Diego left his bags here? he says. Yes she says, Diego and I dumped them in the toilet before we left, he obviously never came back for them. We drink our pints we lean forward on our chairs. We play a game, a memory game about the contents of the suitcases: packets of Sportsman and packets of Horseman. She closes her eyes: watches, Codeine. We go outside to smoke tubes: saris, cheap plastic toys, watches... we already said watches!

It takes us three trips to get the bags up from the cellar onto the street. What if the bags contain contraband? Street drugs! Explosives! Taxidermy! He goes off to fetch a shopping trolley and when he returns the bags are piled up and she's sitting on top of them. The red electric clock above the corner shop shows 17.24. Together we load the trolley. One of the wheels is fucked and the pile of bags is high so maneuvering it requires both force and delicacy, also: concentration, coordination, communication, commitment. We bicker in the road. How funny things are how odd. The sadness comes and goes. Crossing over to the Meadows we blast through a red light and the brown nylon suitcase branded *Fashion!* topples off. At the top of Middle Meadow Walk the trolley picks up speed and the bags start to wobble. We pull back and turn off at Sainsbury's. He waits outside, examines the composition of the pile. A wind picks up, the sun is weak through the trees. He's starting to feel cold again. When she emerges from Sainsbury's she's carrying a plastic bag. A number of packages from the

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2. Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 4.

fruit and veg and meat and bakery sections, all marked with yellow “reduced price” stickers. We move off, the trolley rattles down Middle Meadow Walk, the front left wheel snagging and squealing on the path. The trolley speeds up on the decline and he races to the front, bracing himself against it while she navigates through choochers and festival types and tourists. With one hand she dips into the Sainsbury’s bag, pulls out a box of éclairs, opens it with her teeth and shakes one out. The chocolate strip doesn’t survive the operation, it’s stuck to the inside of the box. She swears to herself and when the éclair is gone she tries to dislodge the strip which loosens her grip on the trolley, it shoots forward straight into him, the dark green vinyl suitcase sliding, she grabs it and the strap comes off in her hand

BOOM

The trolley has run aground on the grass verge. He’s lying beside it, clutching his leg. When she tries to get him to his feet he screams in pain. She looks at the color of his face. The Codeine. Twenty minutes later, with a help of a girl dressed as the ghost of a Victorian undertaker, we maneuver the trolley downhill to the bottom of Middle Meadow Walk, over the confused intersection and onto North Meadow Walk, passing buskers, posters for the comics tragedies. Only now can he climb—with her help—onto the pile of bags, the Codeine having kicked in, though was ever a kick so soft so dreamy so molten so creamy. He lies back on the bags, lips spread in a wide halfsmile like the lips of the barwoman in Sandy Bells. *The sadness* mixed with a new curiosity and the stupid white light. She bending double against the trolley to get it over a rough patch. He saying, If you are a beast of burden then I am a burden. Her: You look like one of the bags. We’re silent for a while. She tells him something she remembers from last night. Something Diego said. They were only allowed one suitcase when they left. What was left behind? Yes what was left behind? What about livestock? Eaten or commandeered but not the dogs, do you want to know about the dogs? Yes he says, he wants to know but at the same time he’s looking up at the trees seeing how the sun is low in the trees and the gathering of the trees and while he is thinking about the trees she is telling him the story of the dogs on Diego Garcia and how they were rounded up, herded into a copra processing shed and gassed. Before they gassed the dogs they had tried poisoning them though this turned out to be inefficient, unhygienic. Diego remembered his dog going missing, then, playing on the beach one day, seeing what looked like a rock and his friend’s dog circling it and howling and when they ran up there was Madu, his stomach burst and maggots crawling out. Though that can’t be right she says, Diego wasn’t even born then. It’s just a story. It’s *someone’s* story. *Sing! Sing! Sing!* goes the fucked wheel. He laughs. I can’t sing. Will you sing? OK, but what? Sing to me in Creole. I only know one song she says and she sings it, *Roseda*. We exit the Meadows we cross Home Street. And then he goes and leaves his bags he says, Maybe now he feels free, maybe he needed to bring his bags halfway round the world and dump them just to feel free. Think about the effort of me pushing you she says, think about this journey home. But he says, But. We are home we are always home.

Natasha Soobramanien (Brussels) and Luke Williams (London) are the authors, respectively, of Genie and Paul (Myriad Editions, 2012), and The Echo Chamber (Viking, 2011). Their collaborative second novel, Diego Garcia, is being published in installments. Chapter 1, “Debt,” first appeared in issue 12 of The White Review and is now available on diegogarciabook.tumblr.com. For updates see @soobramanien.